

In the first year this agreement is in place, our trade with Colombia will increase by \$1 billion. That increase will translate to not only jobs but good-paying jobs in the cargo area of the airports, as well as in our ports and harbors. These are good-paying jobs, which pay well above the minimum wage. These are the kinds of jobs we need to create in Florida and across the United States so the American worker can benefit from this enhanced trade relationship.

There is another dimension to this problem, which I know has been touched upon, and I wish to put my two cents in. We are in an ideological battle in Latin America. The fact is the Cold War ended, and we pretty well let our guard down in terms of this ideological competition. Well, it is back in a big kind of way. We have the country of Venezuela, under the rule of a tyrant, who is less democratic every day and who has maniacal ambitions of conquering the entire region. He talks of a Bolivian revolution. That ideology is rooted in the Castro brothers in Cuba, who have given him the playbook, if you will. On the other side of Colombia is Ecuador. We know Colombia, for 40 years, has been in a fight with terrorists, with those who would subvert the democratic process. Colombia has had a long and established tradition of democracy. This tradition is now threatened by the FARC, the narcoterrorists who have been kidnapping, killing, and maiming in Colombia for a number of years.

We know, because of recent incidents that have occurred, that the Venezuelan Government, with assistance from the Cubans, has been funding and giving all sorts of resources to the FARC. The fact is the FARC is in existence today in large part because of the support they are getting from Venezuela. Venezuela now is engaging in new negotiations with Russia, and Hugo Chavez will be traveling to Russia in the near future to sign another large arms agreement. With the price of oil at \$120 a barrel, Venezuela is awash with cash that it is utilizing to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries in the region, with Colombia, with the FARC, and it is also interfering in the political process in other countries, where large sums of money are being passed to the political candidates of their favor.

The United States is AWOL in the region. We need to engage there. The worst message we can send to those who look to the United States for leadership and partnership and friendship is we are an uncertain ally, that we will not even go into a free-trade agreement which, in fact, is to the great benefit of the United States, simply for politics as usual in Washington. That is unacceptable.

I submit it is in the long-term best interest of the United States, not only from an economic standpoint but also from a geopolitical standpoint, from the regional implications of the trade

agreement, and what it would mean to all those in the region who look to the United States for a signal: Are you with us or will you ignore us? Are you going to support democracies or not stand behind democracies?

The time is now. I know the Hispanic community of America looks upon this agreement as a signal. I know there is a great movement afoot by those who deeply care about the region and about the need for this agreement to help create jobs in America, and it is going to be felt and heard throughout this Nation.

So I am pleased to join my colleagues in talking today about the virtues of the free-trade agreement with Colombia. It is important from an economic standpoint, and it is important to create jobs. I know it will create jobs in Florida. I know it will create jobs in other parts of the United States. I know it is good for Colombia. It will tighten and close ranks with a country that is our ally and long-time friend.

I believe the time has come for this agreement to get an up-or-down vote on the floor of the Senate and in the House. It is time for Speaker PELOSI to not play politics with something of this importance, this magnitude. I ask that the free-trade agreement with Colombia be brought to a vote and that we have an opportunity to engage with this close ally and friend.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. NELSON of Nebraska). The Senator from Texas is recognized.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, how much time remains on our side for morning business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There are 1½ minutes.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I thank my distinguished colleague from Florida for his leadership on this issue. This is not one of those issues that grabs a headline, but it is certainly one that is very important to the economy of the United States, and it is important to our national security.

There is one other point I wish to make in that regard. For those concerned about the exodus of individuals from Latin America and other parts of the world who are looking for jobs and opportunities because they have none at home, this is an important part of our overall strategy to try to see that people have jobs and they have hope where they live, so they don't feel compelled to have to come to the United States in order to get a job and provide for their family. This is an important part of our strategy across Latin America.

There is another initiative that I think we will be hearing more about soon, called the Meridia Initiative, to help our ally in Mexico, President Calderon, as he fights the drug cartels down there, for the future of that country, which of course is on our southern border, 1,600 miles of which is common border with my State of Texas.

Whether we like it or not—and I know some people don't—our fate, in

many ways, and our economy and our security are inextricably tied to countries in Latin America, in the Western Hemisphere. It is not smart—it is perhaps even naive—to think we can ignore what is happening in Colombia, in Mexico, and we can fail to come to the aid of our allies and people who are like-minded in wanting to establish democracy, security, and prosperity in those countries. It is naive to think we can simply turn a blind eye to things such as the Columbia Free Trade Agreement and the Meridia Initiative to help President Calderon in Mexico fight the drug cartels, in what is a fight for the future of that great country on our southern border.

I yield the floor and yield back the rest of our time. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, what is the present business of the Senate?

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is now closed.

FLOOD INSURANCE REFORM AND MODERNIZATION ACT OF 2007—MOTION TO PROCEED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 2284, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to S. 2284, a bill to amend the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968, to restore the financial solvency of the flood insurance fund, and for other purposes.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, my colleague from Louisiana would like to enter into a discussion. Before we make any additional motions, I yield the floor to my colleague.

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, I thank the chairman and ranking member for their cooperation and help on this bill. As they know, this issue and this bill is an enormous concern for all of us in coastal regions. In particular, my colleague from Louisiana and myself and the two distinguished Senators from Mississippi have been very focused on this bill and on several amendments, also, that we believe are absolutely critical to improve it as we reauthorize this necessary program.

As we have told the chairman and the ranking member in discussions over many weeks, we have no intention to obstruct and filibuster and stand in the way of reauthorizing this important program. But we do have to have